

## **Policy - Safeguarding and Protecting Children**

### **Introduction**

Lytchett Matravers Parish Council is committed to providing a safe environment for children. The purpose of this policy is to safeguard children who come into contact with representatives of the council and to facilitate the best possible professional practice from the council, its staff, elected members and volunteers.

### **Policy Statement**

Lytchett Matravers Parish Council is committed to facilitating and maintaining the safest possible environment for children enabling them to enjoy the play areas, open spaces, buildings and any activities provided by or on behalf of the Parish Council, while ensuring that their safety is respected.

### **The Aim of the Policy**

To provide a safe and healthy environment for those children who come into direct contact with the council's staff, parish councillors and volunteers while on council premises and property.

### **Policy Objective**

To contribute to the personal safety of all children using the facilities and resources of the Parish Council, through actively promoting awareness, good practice and sound procedures.

### **Implementation of Policy**

In order to implement the child protection policy Colehill Parish Council will undertake to:

- Promote a safe and supportive environment for all children in play areas, open and indoor spaces managed by the Council.
- Ensure that all staff of Lytchett Matravers Parish Council and elected members are aware of the importance of child protection issues and their responsibilities arising from the policy.
- Ensure that any activity carried out by staff and elected members of Lytchett Matravers Parish Council which involve any exposure to children is sound in terms of child protection as regards personnel, practices and premises.
- All meetings/consultations involving children to be open to all and held in a public place
- A minimum of two adults to be present at all times during the meeting/consultation

## **Allegations against Employees/Councillors/Volunteers**

If a child, parent or guardian makes allegations to the Parish Council against any person working for or acting on behalf of the Parish Council it will be recorded by the Parish Clerk. On receipt of the complaint the Parish Clerk will contact Dorset County Children's Services Social Care and/or the Police to appraise them of the situation.

The Parish Clerk should inform the person against whom an allegation has been made as soon as possible; unless there appears to be a case that this might prejudice a criminal investigation. – This will require consultation with the Police to ascertain the correct procedure.

The course of action to be taken thereon will be decided by the nature of the allegation(s). An employee may be suspended from duty while allegations are being investigated.

In the event that the allegation is made against the Parish Clerk or a Council member, the above procedures will be dealt with by the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Parish Council.

## **Reporting of Concerns**

Those working on Parish Council activities, including council members, have a duty to ensure that any suspicion, incident, allegation or other manifestation relating to child protection is reported to the Parish Clerk (the "Designated Person").

The Parish Clerk will take appropriate action and report to the Police and or Children's Services Social Care.

## **Review of this policy**

The Parish Council shall review this policy, its effectiveness and regarding its implementation annually and will ensure that employees and statutory authorities input are sought as appropriate.

Adopted (date)

Signed

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Chairman

Signed

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Clerk

Review due: 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011

## **Procedures to ensure a speedy and effective response for dealing with concerns about the physical, sexual or emotional abuse of children or their neglect.**

Under no circumstances should anyone within or acting on behalf of the Parish Council begin to carry out an investigation into suspicions or concerns about a child. This is the role of the statutory services and any concerns or worries should be passed to the Parish Clerk who will notify the authorities.

The following sections of these procedures cover:

1. Definition of child abuse
2. Identification of different categories of abuse
3. Responding to signs or suspicions of abuse, action to be taken to record the matter, and who to report it to.

### **1. WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE? Definitions / categories**

#### **What are abuse and neglect?**

It is generally accepted that there are four main forms of abuse. The following definitions are based on those from *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (HM Government 2005).

#### Physical abuse

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Physical abuse, as well as being a result of an act of commission, can also be caused through omission or the failure to act to protect.

#### Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploration or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

#### Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts (oral sex). They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Boys and girls can be sexually abused by males and/or females, by adults and by other young people. This includes people from all different walks of life.

#### Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a

parent or carer failing to provide adequate food and clothing, shelter including exclusion from home or danger, failure to ensure adequate supervision including the use of adequate care-takers, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

It is accepted that in all forms of abuse there are elements of emotional abuse, and that some children are subjected to more than one form of abuse at any one time.

These four definitions do not minimise other forms of maltreatment.

## 2. RECOGNISING CHILD ABUSE - signs and indicators

Recognising child abuse is not easy, and it is not your responsibility to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place or if a child is at significant risk. ***You do, however, have a responsibility to act if you have a concern about a child's welfare or safety.***

The following information is intended to help you to be alert to the signs of possible abuse.

### Physical abuse

Most children will collect cuts and bruises in their daily life. These are likely to be in places where there are bony parts of their body, like elbows, knees and shins. Some children, however, will have bruising which can almost only have been caused non-accidentally. An important indicator of physical abuse is where bruises or injuries are unexplained or the explanation does not fit the injury. A delay in seeking medical treatment for a child when it is obviously necessary is also a cause for concern. Bruising may be more or less noticeable on children with different skin tones or from different racial groups and specialist advice may need to be taken.

Patterns of bruising that are suggestive of physical child abuse include:

- Bruising in children who are not independently mobile
- Bruising in babies
- Bruises that are seen away from bony prominences
- Bruises to the face, back, stomach, arms, buttocks, ears and hands
- Multiple bruises in clusters
- Multiple bruises of uniform shape
- Bruises that carry the imprint of an implement used, hand marks or fingertips

Although bruising is the commonest injury in physical abuse, fatal non-accidental head injury and non-accidental fractures can occur without bruising. Any child who has unexplained signs of pain or illness should be seen promptly by a doctor.

Other physical signs of abuse may include:

- Cigarette burns
- Adult bite marks
- Broken bones
- Scalds

Changes in behaviour which can also indicate physical abuse:

- Fear of parents being approached for an explanation
- Aggressive behaviour or severe temper outbursts
- Flinching when approached or touched
- Reluctance to get changed, for example wearing long sleeves in hot weather
- Running away from home.

### Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse can be difficult to detect or measure, and often children who appear well cared for may be emotionally abused by being taunted, put down or belittled. They may receive little or no love, affection or attention from their parents or carers. Emotional abuse can also take the form of children not being allowed to mix/play with other children.

The physical signs of emotional abuse may include:

- A failure to thrive or grow, particularly if the child puts on weight in other circumstances, e.g. in hospital or away from their parents' care
- Sudden speech disorders
- Developmental delay, either in terms of physical or emotional progress.

Changes in behaviour which can also indicate emotional abuse include:

- Neurotic behaviour, e.g. sulking, hair twisting, rocking
- Being unable to play
- Fear of making mistakes
- Self harm
- Fear of parents being approached regarding their behaviour.

### Sexual abuse

Adults who use children to meet their own sexual needs abuse both girls and boys of all ages, including infants and toddlers. Usually, in cases of sexual abuse it is the child's behaviour which may cause you to become concerned, although physical signs can also be present. In all cases, children who talk about sexual abuse do so because they want it to stop. It is important, therefore, that they are listened to and taken seriously.

The physical signs of sexual abuse may include:

- Pain or itching in the genital/anal areas
- Bruising or bleeding near genital/anal areas
- Sexually transmitted disease
- Vaginal discharge or infection
- Stomach pains
- Discomfort when walking or sitting down
- Pregnancy.

Changes in behaviour which can also indicate sexual abuse include:

- Sudden or unexplained changes in behaviour, e.g. becoming aggressive or withdrawn
- Fear of being left with a specific person or group of people
- Having nightmares
- Running away from home
- Sexual knowledge which is beyond their age or developmental level
- Sexual drawings or language
- Bedwetting
- Eating problems such as overeating or anorexia
- Self harm or mutilation, sometimes leading to suicide attempts
- Saying they have secrets they cannot tell anyone about
- Substance or drug abuse
- Suddenly having unexplained sources of money

- Not being allowed to have friends (particularly in adolescence)
- Acting in a sexually explicit way towards adults.

### Neglect

Neglect can be a difficult form of abuse to recognise, yet have some of the most lasting and damaging effects on children. The physical signs of neglect may include:

- Constant hunger, sometimes stealing food from other children
- Constantly dirty or smelly
- Loss of weight, or being constantly underweight
- Inappropriate dress for the conditions.

Changes in behaviour which can also indicate neglect may include:

- Complaining of being tired all the time
- Not requesting medical assistance and/or failing to attend appointments
- Having few friends
- Mentioning their being left alone or unsupervised.

The above list is not meant to be definitive but as a guide to assist you. ***It is important to remember that many children and young people will exhibit some of these indicators at some time, and the presence of one or more should not be taken as proof that abuse is occurring.*** There may well be other reasons for changes in behaviour, such as a death or the birth of a new baby in their family, relationship problems between their parents/carers etc.

### **3. RESPONDING TO SIGNS OF ABUSE**

1. Stay calm.
2. Listen carefully to what is said.
3. Find an appropriate early opportunity to explain that it is likely that the information will need to be shared with others - do not promise to keep secrets.
4. Allow the child to continue at her/his own pace.
5. Ask questions for clarification only, and at all times avoid asking questions that suggest a particular answer.
6. Reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling you.
7. Tell them what you will do next and with whom the information will be shared.
8. **Record in writing what was said using the child's own words as soon as possible - note date, time, any names mentioned, to whom the information was given and ensure that the record is signed and dated.**
9. Contact the Parish Clerk (the "Designated Person" for reporting concerns to Children's Services) with all of the above details as soon as possible.